

Attention: News and Assignment Editors

Prevalence of driving under the influence of cannabis has doubled in Canada since 1989, says new report by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

OTTAWA, Dec. 19, 2006 – Prevalence of driving under the influence of cannabis has doubled since 1989 and young males in Canada are driving under the influence of cannabis as often as or more often than they drive under the influence of alcohol, says a new research report released today by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canada's national addictions agency.

CCSA researchers analyzed data from the 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS) – the most comprehensive profile of alcohol and other drug use in Canada since 1994 – to help fill the research gap between what we know about drugs and driving and what we know about alcohol and driving. Here are some of the findings contained in the report, entitled *Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis*:

- 4.8% of drivers responding to the CAS survey reported driving within two hours of using cannabis in the previous 12 months, a figure which has more than doubled since comparable studies done in 1988 and 1989.
- Males were 3.6 times more likely than females to drive under the influence of cannabis.
- Among those who reported driving under the influence of cannabis in the last year, the mean number of self-reported occurrences was 24.5.
- People who reported driving under the influence of cannabis also reported consuming higher-than-average amounts of alcohol. This is a significant point, since combining cannabis with even small amounts of alcohol significantly increases the observed level of impairment.

Despite the increase in the prevalence of driving under the influence of cannabis, it is not clear what impact this is having on crash-related death and injury.

“Controlled studies that have attempted to determine the risk of crash involvement associated with driving after cannabis use have shown mixed results,” said Rita Notarandrea, CCSA's Director of Research and Policy. “The CAS data provide us with a more accurate understanding of the prevalence of driving after cannabis use in Canada, but points to a gap in understanding how much of a factor this is in causing or contributing to harms such as motor vehicle crashes.”

The CAS report also cites external research suggesting that young cannabis users may not perceive their driving ability to be adversely affected after using cannabis, or at least less affected than after consuming alcohol. Many young people also believe that it is difficult for police to detect and charge drivers for driving after cannabis use.

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“The CAS data are telling us that youth, particularly young males, are a high-risk group and that many of these young drivers may have a false sense of security about driving under the influence of cannabis,” added Notarandrea. “This information underlines the need for measures such as the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) program, which measures level of impairment, to help correct these misconceptions. CCSA regards the DRE program as an essential component of a comprehensive strategy that should include prevention and awareness programs targeted at youth; adequate funding for DRE officer training, and for continued research to make improvements to the DRE program; investment in appropriate treatment services for offenders; and the implementation of a range of measures (such as temporary licence suspension) to complement the proposed criminal sanctions.”

To access the full report on *Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis*, please visit the CCSA website at www.ccsa.ca

About CCSA

CCSA is Canada's national addictions agency and is supported by Health Canada through Canada's Drug Strategy. Established by an Act of Parliament in 1988, CCSA provides objective, evidence-based information and advice aimed at reducing the health, social and economic harm associated with substance abuse and addictions.

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